New Media Writing: Writing 201.003
The Audio Essay

Fall 2015
October 23-December 11, 2015
Fridays 12-2 pm
Room no. USB 2230

Instructor: Carol Tell | tellc@umich.edu
Office Hours: Fridays 11-12, and by appointment | Office: Sweetland Center for Writing

Course Description:

In this course on the audio essay, students will learn how to compose and publish their own podcasts, using a mixture of narration, interviews, sound effects, and music. Students will begin by developing several short sound-based narratives (“audio postcards”), focusing on such elements as voice, non-verbal sound, and interviews. Using the creative nonfiction genre as a model, students will then write an original audio essay, which they will record and workshop with their peers. In doing so they will examine what role sound plays in the development of voice and point of view, and what particular limitations and opportunities are afforded by writing in this medium. By listening to a variety of audio essays and shorter audio pieces, students will also learn effective techniques for pacing, audio layering, and balancing anecdote with reflection.

Course Goals:

• To develop writing skills in the audio essay, with a focus on voice, point of view, description, and setting.
• To become familiar with creating sound recordings, which is a multistage process that includes:
  o Pre-writing,
  o Field recording and research,
  o Gathering prerecorded audio,
  o Secondary research,
  o Planning and structuring,
  o Editing, restructuring and rewriting,
  o Polishing transitions, tone, sound quality, and grammar.
• To articulate critical insights into existing sound recordings and learn and practice creative listening skills.
• To use the genre of the audio essay towards critical inquiry of your chosen subject matter.
• To analyze the differences (both limitations and opportunities) between sound and audio essays.

Readings and Audio:
There are no books in this course. Readings and audio files will be found on the CTools site or as links on the syllabus.

**Assignments/Grading:**

Exercise 1: Short Lists 10%
Exercise 2: On Location 10%
Exercise 3: The Interview 10%
Final Project: Audio Essay 50%
   (script and audio essay)
Reflection: 10%
Class Participation: 10%

**Class Participation and Some Rules:**

Effective participation is a crucial part of this class, and your thoughtful contributions will make or break how interesting the class is. So speak up! Although class participation will be a part of your overall grade, I do not grade on the *quantity* of comments made in each class, but on the general *quality* of comments. I don’t expect this to be an issue, but I will say that disruptive or disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated and will significantly reduce your grade.

Everyone needs to be attentive and alert in class. No cell phones, texting, emailing, general Internet surfing, facebooking, etc., during class. If you are doing something else instead of focusing on our work, you will be marked absent. Because you are, right? Please turn off and keep stored all electronics, including cell phones.

You may bring drinks to class, but please no food, unless you have enough to share with all of us.

Please note that the registrar’s office suggests 6 hours per week work outside of class for a seven-week, one-credit course. All components must be complete to receive credit for the course, including audio postcards, drafts, final audio essay, and attendance.

**Attendance:**

Since there are only seven classes, attending all classes is required. An unexcused absence will lower your final grade by a third. If you miss more than one class, each absence will lower your final grade by two-thirds. Two late arrivals equal a full absence. Students missing three classes will not receive credit. Whether an absence is excused or not, I’d appreciate your letting me know if you won’t be in class.

In terms of religious holidays, the University of Michigan Office of the Provost states the following:
Although the University of Michigan, as an institution, does not observe religious holidays, it has long been the University's policy that every reasonable effort should be made to help students avoid negative academic consequences when their religious obligations conflict with academic requirements. Absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the period of absence. Students who expect to miss classes, examinations, or other assignments as a consequence of their religious observance shall be provided with a reasonable alternative opportunity to complete such academic responsibilities (http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html).

Submitting Assignments:
You need to submit your assignments to the CTools site before the time we meet for class each week. We will go over in class on the first day how to upload podcasts to the CTools Dropbox.

Copyright, Fair Use, and Plagiarism:
Please adhere to the Copyright and Fair Use policy as stated on the UM website (http://www.lib.umich.edu/copyright-office-michigan-publishing). This link gives an excellent overview of appropriate use of “borrowing” sounds, images, icons, etc., and how to give full attributions when appropriate.

Plagiarism is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in this course. If you plagiarize, you will automatically receive a failing grade for the assignment and possibly for the course. We will discuss plagiarism in detail during class, but you should also read and follow rules against plagiarism found on the U Mich library website (http://www.lib.umich.edu/shapiro-undergraduate-library/understanding-plagiarism-and-academic-integrity).

Students with Disabilities:
In accordance to UM policy, I will provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities, and I will protect the confidentiality of students’ individual learning needs. Please show me your letter from the Office for Students with Disabilities (SSD) describing approved accommodations by the second week of classes.

Schedule:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Topics</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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| Oct. 23 | **Introduction:** The Genre of Creative Nonfiction  
Audacity and Audio Recorder Workshop (with Phill Cameron, Language Resource Center)  
Practice Reading for Broadcast  
First Assignment: The Short List |
| Oct. 30 | **Voice as Material**  
The Essay and the Sound Essay  
Second Assignment: Place or Setting |
| Oct. 30 | **Complete and Upload:**  
• First Assignment Due (Short List)  
Listen:  
* Ishmael Beah, “Unusual Normality”  
Read and Listen:  
• David Sedaris, “The Stadium Pal” (CTools text)  
• [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejEcOMqBvpY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejEcOMqBvpY)  
• From *This I Believe*:  
  3. “Remembering All the Boys” [http://thisibelieve.org/essay/21255](http://thisibelieve.org/essay/21255)  
• Short Lists  
  1. [http://transom.org/?page_id=4650](http://transom.org/?page_id=4650)  
  2. [http://www.atlantic.org/audio/sonicid/white_paint.mp3](http://www.atlantic.org/audio/sonicid/white_paint.mp3) |
| Nov. 6 | **Place as Material**  
From Text to Script: Transforming Traditional Essays  
Third Assignment: The Interview | **Complete and Upload:**  
- Second Assignment Due (Place as Material)  
**Read:**  
- Student Sample Essays (CTools)  
- Joan Didion, “In Bed”  
**Listen To:**  
- This American Life  
| --- | --- |
| Nov. 13 | **The Art of the Interview**  
Complete and Upload:  
- Third Assignment Due (Interview)  
**Read:**  
- Ira Glass and Jessica Abel, *Radio: An Illustrated Guide*  
**Listen To:**  
- Terri Gross  
  1. Maurice Sendak [http://www.npr.org/2012/05/08/152248901/fresh-air-remembers-author-maurice-sendak](http://www.npr.org/2012/05/08/152248901/fresh-air-remembers-author-maurice-sendak)  
  3. Bill O’Reilly (optional) [http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=3925277&m=3925278](http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=3925277&m=3925278) |
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<th>Task Description</th>
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<td>Nov. 20</td>
<td>Elements of the Podcast/Audio Essay: Putting It All Together</td>
<td><strong>Complete and Upload:</strong></td>
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<td>Texture and Pacing</td>
<td>• Proposal for Sound Essay Due</td>
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<td>From Text to Script Part II</td>
<td><strong>Listen To:</strong></td>
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<td>• “Heyoon” <a href="http://99percentinvisible.org/search/heyoon">http://99percentinvisible.org/search/heyoon</a></td>
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<td>• “The Other Man: Psychic Buddha, Qu’est-ce Que C’est” <a href="http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/212/the-other-man?act=1#play">http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/212/the-other-man?act=1#play</a></td>
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<td><strong>Read:</strong></td>
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<td>• Dave Gilson, “Writing a Radio Script”</td>
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<td>• Script of “Psychic Buddha, Qu’eset-ce Que C’est” <a href="www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/212/transcript">www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/212/transcript</a></td>
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<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>Peer Critiques</td>
<td><strong>Complete and Upload:</strong></td>
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<td>• Draft of Audio Essay (Script) Due</td>
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<td>Dec. 11</td>
<td>Presentation of Podcasts</td>
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<td>• Final Draft, Script, and Reflection Due</td>
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